



**Prepared Remarks for Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales  
at the Senators' National Town Hall on Methamphetamine  
Awareness and Prevention**

**January 23, 2006**

Thank you.

The scourge of methamphetamine is tightening its grip on communities across America. As we have heard, meth is a unique and deadly threat to our Nation. It is highly addictive. It is easy and cheap to produce. And as many in this room know, it destroys lives far beyond those of just the addicts and the users.

With every tragedy and every act of violence... with every child abandoned because of meth use and every life lost to meth abuse... the vise grip is turned another notch. And that means community and national leaders are being squeezed for answers – for some response to this rapidly growing problem.

Whether you are here in Washington, D.C., or watching at home in Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska or Arkansas, you're asking the same questions of people like your United States Senators, your mayors and Governors, and your Attorney General.

What can we do to stop the spread of meth?

You're going to hear a number of compelling stories today about the tragedy of meth use. The one I carry close to my heart – especially as a father of two young boys – involves a four-year-old Colorado boy named Romeo. Romeo's parents were running a methamphetamine lab in their home.

One day, at five o'clock in the morning, a SWAT team was making the final preparations to execute a search warrant on the lab. As the final checks were made, one of the detectives on surveillance reported that he saw a "skeleton" coming out the front door.

His fellow officers thought he must have been hallucinating. But then his colleagues got a better look and saw the same thing: It was Romeo dressed in a skeleton costume and looking up and down his street. The officers at first thought he was acting as a lookout for his parents.

An officer later approached Romeo. He asked Romeo why he was dressed in a skeleton outfit and standing on his front porch. And why was he looking up and down the street at such an early hour in the morning.

Romeo's eyes lit up as he explained that later that day his nursery school was holding a Halloween party. As he told the story, his shoulders slumped. He told the officer that he really wanted to go to the party but he hadn't been able to wake up his mom for the last few days and didn't know where the bus stop was. Romeo said he thought that if he got up early enough and put his costume on, he might be able to see the bus and catch it as it drove by.

At four years old, Romeo could not count to ten. But as officers later learned, he could draw a picture – in detail – of an entire meth lab operation.

So, what are we doing at the Justice Department to help children like Romeo?

We are working to save lives with a simple and proven formula: Communicate, cooperate, and coordinate our efforts at the federal level with our State and local law enforcement partners. We're tackling every aspect of this challenging problem...and we're doing it together.

First, I have directed the United States Attorney's Offices to make the prosecution of meth cooks and distributors – especially those who are repeat offenders – a high priority. This means U.S. Attorneys will be going into federal court, seeking stiff sentences for major players in the meth trade.

During the last ten years, our U.S. Attorneys have more than quadrupled the number of meth cases filed and defendants charged. And we are continuing to apply the pressure on these criminals.

In addition, I have directed our federal law enforcement agencies to target major organizations and large-scale providers of the drug, and the ingredients used to produce it.

Finally, I want you to know that the Drug Enforcement Administration commits more than \$145 million per year to combat meth. Earlier this year, Administrator Karen Tandy declared meth a top priority for the DEA's Mobile Enforcement Teams.

These teams are now allocating expertise and resources to areas hit hard by the practical challenges and high costs of prosecuting meth producers and distributors.

In addition, the DEA also has Clandestine Lab Enforcement Teams, which help state and local law enforcement detect and clean up meth labs. In the past two years, they've helped to administer more than 18,000 of these cleanups. The federal government also acts as a conduit for best practices and training as well as a source for the latest intelligence about criminal trends around the country. For instance, we provide specialized training to police officers and sheriff's deputies on how best to respond to meth. In the 2004 and 2005 fiscal years, we more than tripled the number of meth-training courses offered nationwide.

For more than seven years, DEA has provided clandestine-lab awareness and certification training to thousands of State and local officers. And in the past year, DEA expanded this clandestine-lab training to include Mexican police officers and prosecutors. As you will hear today, much of the actual meth production has moved across the border into Mexico – with the finished product coming back into our country. We're doing everything we can to work with the Department of Homeland Security and our counterparts in the Government of Mexico to address this shared challenge. Because of these efforts, we have had some successes over the last three years, law enforcement has seized, on average, 45 small toxic meth labs or dumpsites each day across America.

But even as we work to cut off meth at the source, the problem grows. A recent survey by the National Association of Counties revealed that 58 percent of counties ranked methamphetamine as their No. 1 drug problem—three times as high as the next threat: cocaine.

According to our most recent national data, 583,000 people are “current” users of meth—having used the drug sometime within the 30 days before being surveyed. Over the previous year, 1.4 million people had used meth.

To put these numbers in context: That's nearly four times the number of heroin users in the United States. That means we have to work harder. We have to do more.

State governments have responded to this new challenge. Many have enacted tough legislation to control the flow of simple ingredients used to manufacture methamphetamine – such as the pseudophedrine that is found in many cold medicines. These new laws have had positive results – and more and more state legislatures are following suit.

The U.S. Congress has a similar opportunity to strengthen our efforts against meth. Both the House and Senate have acted, and now the conference report on the USA PATRIOT Act includes many important provisions that will help law enforcement in the fight against methamphetamine. I look forward to Congress acting quickly on the PATRIOT Act renewal legislation so that we will have additional tools to fight meth.

Thank you for inviting me. The meth issue is one of my top priorities, and we will continue to exhaust every available resource to loosen the stranglehold of this drug in our communities.

Every day is a new opportunity to make progress for the American people. I'd like to thank Senator Burns and Senator Coleman for searching for answers on meth.

That search should continue in homes and schools across the country. You will find a lot of information – and a

lot of answers – on the DEA's meth website at "just think twice dot com."

We all share a responsibility to work together on this issue until we ensure a bright, successful, and drug-free future for our children and grandchildren, including children like Romeo.

Thank you.

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